

Faro de Punta de Las Figuras
(Punta de Las Figuras Light)
Punta de las Figuras
Palmas
Arroyo
Puerto Rico

HAER No. PR-10

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: On Point Figuras, the south shore of the easterly part of Puerto Rico, Palmas, Arroyo, Puerto Rico
Position 17° 57' 25" N
66° 02' 53" W

Date of Erection: 1893

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Coast Guard

Original Owner: Central Lighthouse Commission
Colonial Public Works Office
Harbor and Port Section
Government of Spain

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: The Punta Figuras Light was built as a local light to aid navigation into Arroyo and Patillas Ports in 1893. Originally it was a 5th order light, one of only two built, and showed a fixed white light with a 12 mile range. The dilapidated building stands surrounded by a swampy, marshy, stagnant, gray sand shore. South of the lighthouse, dark green rolling hills and distant gray-blueish Central Mountain Range cliffs provide a rather surrealistic ambiance to a white painted structure built in a once malaria-infected area. The rectangular and proportioned neo-classic structure vibrates under a hot, deep sky and dramatically counter-balances the entangled, lush tropical vegetation.

In spite of its vandalization, it is an excellent example of the lighthouse system's characteristics. It closely followed the officially established arrangement of rooms within an appropriate 18 x 8 x 5.7 mts. brick and stone structure built around the tower. The main entrance led to a vestibule of a five room 2nd class keeper's quarters including the engineer's and keeper's assistant room. The Spanish kitchen, remains of which still stands in situ, was located on the SE corner of the dwelling.

A back door leads to a near patio where the brick cistern and well, with its original cast-iron work, still are in place. Some examples of its firewood beams, Genoa marble slabs, and original roof are preserved. But, undouted, its most distinctive characteristic is its decorative elements, particularly, the stuccoed high relief frieze formed by alternate circles and rectangles embracing the entire parapet. The frieze-cornice arrangement, without the high relief, is repeated at a smaller scale, in the octagonal tower. It had a winding cast-iron stairway that opened into a 5th order lantern: 1.6 mt. in diameter of cast-iron, copper, and glass. This had a cement gallery with a cast-iron balustrade.

The original illuminating apparatus was a lenticular, 1892, 37.5 cms. diameter Barbier, Bernard, & Cie. lens. It had 4 panels; 5 elements in each panel of the central drum; 5 prisms in each panel above the central drum and 3 below. It was held in place by a cast-iron pedestal.

In 1923 the light characteristics were modified. In 1938 the light was moved to another location and the structure abandoned and boarded. It was reopened during WW II and used as a lookout. After the war it was reboarded. Some years later, surrounding land was leased to the Army until 1963. Since the 1960's the lighthouse has been systematically subjected to devastating vandalism. The lens and lantern were apparently destroyed by vandals in 1969.

It was built as an intermediate light to connect Caja de Muertos and Punta Tuna Lights and at the same time guide the entrance to both ports of Arroyo and Patillas. Architecturally, it is one of the best examples of particularly decorative elements not present in major structures.

Transmitted by:

Kevin Murphy, Historian HAER, August 1984;
from the National Register Nomination
prepared by Dr. Benjamin Nistal-Moret,
August 1979.